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United States
Department of
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Farm Service Agency

Natural Resources
Conservation Service

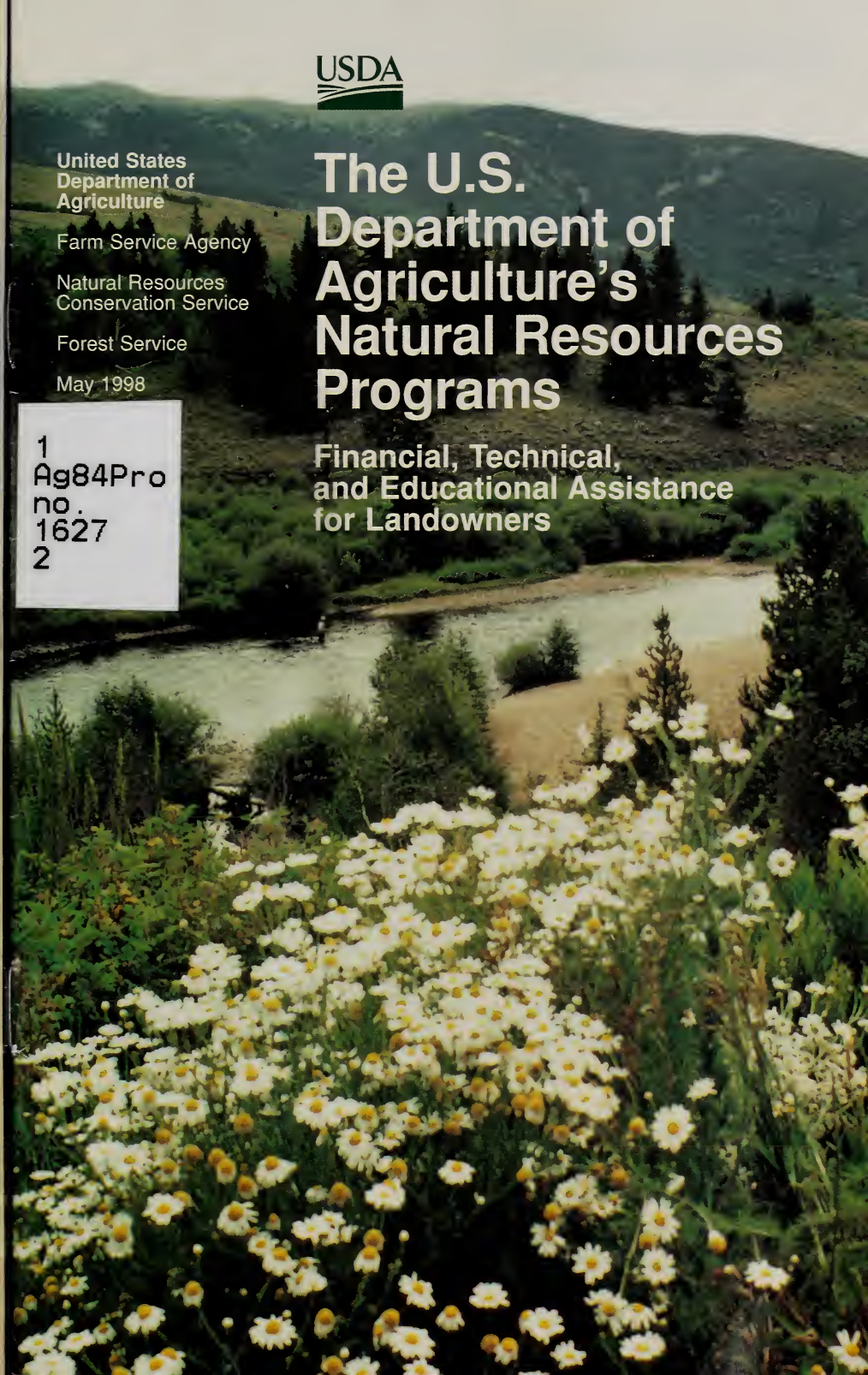
Forest Service

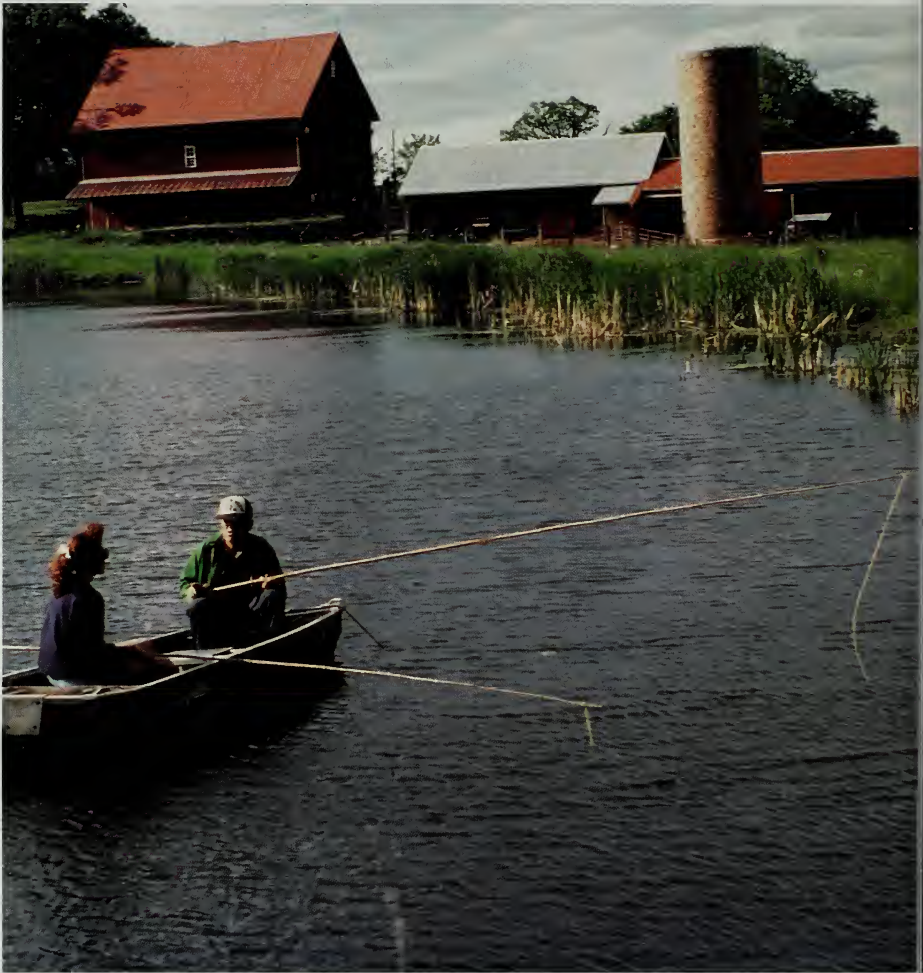
May 1998

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Programs

Financial, Technical,
and Educational Assistance
for Landowners

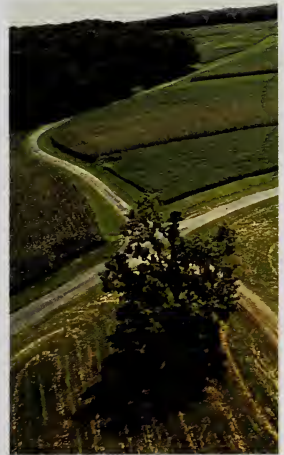
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Introduction

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers landowners financial, technical, and educational assistance to implement conservation practices on privately owned land. Using this help, farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners apply practices that reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, and enhance crop land, forest land, wetlands, grazing lands, and wildlife habitat. Incentives offered by USDA promote sustainable agricultural and forestry practices, which protect and conserve valuable farm and forest land for future generations. USDA assistance also helps individuals and communities restore natural resources after floods, fires, or other natural disasters.



The following are brief overviews of natural resource programs managed by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Forest Service (FS). For more details, contact your local USDA Service Center.

Conservation Reserve Program

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) reduces soil erosion, protects the Nation's ability to produce food and fiber, reduces sedimentation in streams and lakes, improves water quality, establishes wildlife habitat, and enhances forest and wetland resources. It encourages farmers to convert highly erodible cropland or other environmentally sensitive acreage to vegetative cover, such as tame or native grasses, wildlife plantings, trees, filterstrips, or riparian buffers. Farmers receive an annual rental payment for the term of the multi-year contract. Cost sharing is provided to establish the vegetative cover practices.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) provides a flexible and cost-effective means to address agricultural resource problems by targeting Federal and State resources to specific geographic regions of particular environmental sensitivity over a 10- to 15-year period for the Conservation Reserve Program.

The primary CREP objectives are: (1) to create an opportunity where the resources of a State government and the CRP can be targeted in a coordinated manner to address specific conservation and environmental objectives of that State and the Nation; and (2) to improve water quality, erosion control, and wildlife habitat in specific geographic areas which have been adversely impacted by agricultural activities, with emphasis on addressing non-point source water pollution and habitat restoration in a cost-effective manner.

Emergency Conservation Program

The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) provides financial assistance to farmers and ranchers for the restoration of farmlands on which normal farming operations have been impeded by natural disasters. ECP also helps with funds for carrying out emergency water conservation measures during periods of severe drought. Emergency conservation assistance is available for removing debris and restoring permanent fences, terraces, diversions, irrigation systems, and other conservation installations. Conservation problems that existed before a disaster are not eligible.



Emergency Watershed Protection Program

The Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program is designed to reduce threats to life and property in the wake of natural disasters. It provides technical and cost-sharing assistance. Assistance includes establishing vegetative cover; gully control; installing streambank protection devices; removing debris and sediment; and stabilizing levees, channels, and gullies. In subsequent storms, EWP projects protect homes, businesses, highways, and public facilities from further damage. Floodplain easements under EWP may be purchased to help prevent future losses due to natural disasters.





Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) works primarily in locally identified priority areas where there are significant natural resource concerns, such as soil erosion, water quality and quantity, wildlife habitat, wetlands, and forest and grazing lands. Priority is given to areas where State or local governments offer financial, technical, or educational assistance, and to areas where agricultural improvements will help meet water quality objectives. Activities must be carried out according to a conservation plan. Priority area proposals are submitted to the NRCS State Conservationist, who selects those areas within the State based on recommendations from the State Technical Committee.

EQIP is one of several Federal, State, and local conservation programs that farmers and ranchers can use to solve their natural resource concerns. EQIP offers financial, educational, and technical help to install or implement structural, vegetative, and management practices called for in 5- to 10-year contracts. These practices—which include manure management systems, pest management, and erosion control—help improve and maintain the health of natural resources. Cost sharing may pay up to 75 percent of the costs of certain conservation practices. Nationally, half of the funding for EQIP is targeted to livestock-related natural resource concerns and the remainder to other significant conservation priorities.

Farmland Protection Program

The Farmland Protection Program provides funds to State, tribal, or local government entities to help purchase development rights to keep productive farmland in agricultural use. Working through their existing programs, USDA joins with State, tribal, or local governments to acquire conservation easements or other interests from landowners. USDA provides up to 50 percent of the costs of purchasing the easements. To qualify, farmland must: be part of a pending offer from a State, tribe, or local farmland protection program; be privately owned; have a conservation plan; be large enough to sustain agricultural production; be accessible to markets for what the land produces; have adequate infrastructure and agricultural support services; and have surrounding parcels of land that can support long-term agricultural production.



Forest Legacy Program

The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) conserves the resource values of forest land, emphasizing lands of regional and national significance that are threatened with conversion to nonforest uses. Conservation easements or purchases are the methods used to accomplish program objectives. FLP directly supports acquisition of partial interests in privately owned forest lands, helps States implement their conservation plans, and supports State efforts to acquire donated conservation easements. FLP-funded acquisitions are perpetual and may offer public access.

Forest Stewardship Program

The Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) takes a multiple-resource approach to managing nonindustrial private forest lands by bringing the expertise of State-employed foresters, biologists and private consultants to private landowners to help them prepare natural resource management plans. These plans encourage landowners to become active in planning and managing their forests, greatly increasing the likelihood that the forests will remain productive and healthy, and that social, economic and environmental benefits of these lands will be better realized.

Forestry Incentives Program

The Forestry Incentives Program (FIP) supports good forest management practices on privately owned, nonindustrial forest lands nationwide. FIP is designed to benefit the environment while meeting future demands for wood products. Eligible practices are tree planting, timber stand improvement, site preparation for natural regeneration, and related activities. FIP is available in counties designated by a Forest Service survey of eligible private timber acreage.



Small Watershed Program

The Small Watershed Program works through local government sponsors and helps participants solve natural resource and related economic problems on a specific watershed. Project purposes include watershed protection, flood prevention, erosion and sediment control, water supply, water quality, fish and wildlife habitat enhancement, wetlands creation and restoration, and public recreation in watersheds of 250,000 or fewer acres. Both technical and financial assistance are available.



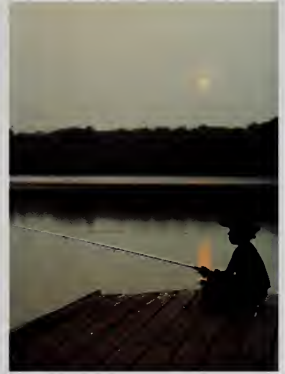
Stewardship Incentive Program

The Stewardship Incentive Program provides technical and financial assistance to encourage nonindustrial private forest landowners to keep their lands and natural resources productive and healthy. Qualifying land includes rural lands with existing tree cover or land suitable for growing trees which is owned by an individual, group, association, corporation, Indian tribe, or other legal private entity. Eligible landowners must have an approved Forest Stewardship Plan and own 1,000 or fewer acres of qualifying land. Authorizations may be obtained for exceptions of up to 5,000 acres.

Wetlands Reserve Program

The Wetlands Reserve Program is a voluntary program to restore wetlands. Participating landowners can establish conservation easements of either permanent or 30-year duration or can enter into restoration cost-share agreements where no easement is involved. In exchange for establishing a permanent easement, the landowner receives payment up to the agricultural value of the land and 100 percent of the restoration costs for restoring the wetland. The 30-year easement payment is 75 percent of what would be provided

for a permanent easement on the same site and 75 percent of the restoration cost. The voluntary agreements are for a minimum 10-year duration and provide for 75 percent of the cost of restoring the involved wetlands. Easements set limits on how the lands may be used in the future. Restoration cost-share agreements establish wetland protection and restoration as the primary land use for the duration of the agreement. In all instances, landowners continue to control access to their land.



Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program provides financial incentives to develop habitat for fish and wildlife on private lands. Participants agree to implement a wildlife habitat development plan, and USDA agrees to provide cost-share assistance for the initial implementation of wildlife habitat development practices. USDA and program participants enter into 5- to 10-year cost-share agreements for wildlife habitat development.

For more information

Contact your local USDA Service Center, listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture. Information is also available on the Internet at the following World Wide Web sites:
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>
<http://www.fsa.usda.gov>
<http://www.fs.fed.us>

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